

**Impact statement -**            ABR

I was born in September 1944. I am nearly 69 years old.

Denis McAlinden came to Taree in 1954. He started to sexually abuse me soon after he arrived in the Parish. I was only 10 years old when the abuse started.

When he arrived in Taree he became a part of our family, and was welcomed into our home by our parents. My siblings and myself at the time thought we were pretty "special" having a priest as a friend of our family.

My family was very involved in the church. McAlinden was always "dropping in" to see us. He was regularly invited to our home for family dinners and special occasions like birthdays and Christmas. Sundays were usually picnic days in the bush or at the beach, and McAlinden was always there. He came on family summer holidays with us every year he was in Taree.

My parents even allowed me to go on holidays with him and another girl to Melbourne.

My parents died not knowing of the truth about McAlinden. They would have been so devastated if they were alive to-day and knew about my abuse and that so many others girls were abused over so many years. They trusted him.

I was raised in a very good Catholic family, attending Mass weekly, sometimes more and participating in a lot of church activities. My parents were wonderful workers for the church. My siblings and I attended a Catholic school from Kinder to Yr 9.

I was involved in many groups through the school, one being The Legion of Mary. McAlinden was put in charge of the Legion of Mary. The average age of the girls was 10-12 years. I often wonder about those girls. I realise now it probably was not just me that he was abusing.

After Legion of Mary meetings, McAlinden would drive some of the girls home and I was always the last to be taken home. He would drive me to the bush and this is where my nightmare begun. He would sexually abuse me and told me it was alright and to be very quiet. I was so scared of him and he said that

he could read my mind. I believed him when he said that if I told anyone he would know because he could read my mind and I would be in a lot of trouble. Although I was only 10 years old, I knew that priests were held in high esteem and everyone trusted them, so why would anyone believe me?

McAlinden would give us gifts for birthdays and Christmas, always giving me the most expensive gifts, probably another way of keeping me quiet.

McAlinden left Taree in 1958 but he stayed in contact with our family for nearly 20 years until the mid-1970's.

When I was engaged and planning our wedding in 1965, my parents thought it would be wonderful if I asked McAlinden to come back to Taree and perform the wedding ceremony. I said "No". They were disappointed and did not ask why. Even though I was 20 years old, I could not tell them.

When I got married in 1965, McAlinden sent a wedding present of Irish linen. I gave it away.

A couple of years after we were married, we moved to another mid-north coast town. When we were living there, in the early to mid 1970's, McAlinden would turn up unannounced at our home.

By 1972, we had three little children, two girls and a boy. I did not let our children out of my sight when McAlinden was visiting. At these times of "surprise visits" I would feel the need to protect my family. He came four or five times and then his visits suddenly stopped. I think that we last heard from him in 1976. My sister lived in Forster and she told me that he had suddenly left the Parish and she thought he had gone to WA. I was glad that he was finally gone.

It was only four years ago when I saw media statements about McAlinden that I told my husband and siblings about what had happened to me. I had filed this all away in the back of my mind but had never forgotten. While I write this statement I can so clearly RECALL what happened back in the 1950's. Everything to do with McAlinden comes flooding back.

*I feel that*

Denis McAlinden was an extremely bad tempered, evil man. He was a sexual predator of little girls. I am so angry that the church kept him hidden and so many women and their families have suffered. That suffering goes on now as the truth comes out. So much secrecy when so many people knew. Someone has to be held accountable. Nearly 60 years after he abused me, finally the truth is coming out.